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November 17, 1950

MEMORANDUM

TO: S - The Secretary
U - Mr. Webb
A - Mr. Jessup
B - Mr. Bruce
P - Mr. Perkins

FROM: S/P - Mr. Matthews

I am attaching a copy of an interesting self-explanatory letter which George Kennan has written to Mr. Nevins of the Council on Foreign Relations. In his accompanying note to me, George said that he had written it because of his inability to attend a meeting of the Council set for next Monday.

Enclosure:

Copy of letter from George Kennan to Mr. Arthur S. Nevins, Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., New York, N.Y.

POLICY PLANNING STAFF
SECRET
Department of State

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November 14, 1951

Dear Mr. Nevins:

I am at present in bed with the grippe, and this illness has set me back so far in my program that I am afraid it will not be possible for me to attend the meeting of the Study Group on and to Europe scheduled for Monday, November 20.

I am grateful to you for the excellent material which accompanied your memorandum of November 10. I would like to be able to comment on it in detail for the Group but cannot do so, in the circumstances. There is only one thought which I would like to leave with you and which you might care to pass on to the members of the Group when they undertake their discussion of this subject.

I was often worried in Washington by the insistance, encountered in various quarters, that we come up with absolute figures for military requirements, divorced from the many non-military factors which give these figures their significance. Your memo starts with the question "What are the requirements, in divisions located on the Continent, for the military defense of Western Europe?" I fail to see how this can be adequately answered unless one knows the answer to certain other questions, notably: (1) What would be the immediate objectives and purposes of the attack to which Western Europe might be subjected, and (2) What would be the state of morale, determination, and political indoctrination of the forces on our side.

With respect to (1) I think there is no justification for the common assumption that the Soviet aim, toward the West, would necessarily be to occupy every Western European country. We still tend to think of war as a sort of boxing match, which is all over and settled when the military decision has fallen. The Soviet rulers do not think this way and will measure the advantages of trying to occupy foreign countries against the way they think that will affect their long-term political purposes. We must always remember that a military flare-up in that area is just as likely to be the result of a general series of international complications in which the Kremlin feels its hand forced as the result of some cold-blooded and deliberate Soviet design. In either of these cases, one cannot rule out the possibility that the Red Army and the satellite armies will be employed only for limited objectives, reliance for further objectives being placed on the general factor of fear and panic and on the exploitation of the civil war potential provided by the Communist factions in Western European countries. We must always remember that the favored means of

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expanding Communist power in civil war, and the Kremlin likes to view the use of the Red Army as supplementary to what can be obtained by the forces of political pressure and subversion. Any future war involving the Soviet Union will therefore be, if they can contrive to make it so, a combination of civil and international conflicts. In such a situation, problems of morale, indoctrination, political determination and the respective training of forces designed for civil and guerilla conflict, will all be of importance.

This being the case, I do not see how military requirements can be viewed in a vacuum disassociated from all these considerations; and I think there is great danger in trying to make precise measurements of our future problems in exact terms of divisions and weapons. This is why I have always myself been inclined to feel that the limits of the Western military establisment should be determined by what is practical and feasible in the respective western countries, granted a due sense of the seriousness of our position. In other words, the measure of what we should have might be defined as "as much as we can arrange to have without damaging the unity, confidence, understanding, and strength of the Western European peoples". An attempt to take too literally the military equation in Western Europe, proceeding on the basis of unproven assumptions about Russian intentions, and without calculating the other factors affecting the great political conflict in which we are involved, can only serve, in my opinion, to high-light our potential weakness, to obscure the true sources of our strength, and to undermine rather than to build up the political confidence and will-to-live of the Western European peoples, on which so much depends.

Please accept these thoughts as my contribution to the discussion and as evidence of my regret that I cannot be there to hear it.

Very sincerely,

George Kennan

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